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ABSTRACT

The 1968 teacher certification regulations of New York State are discussed from the standpoint of changes in requirements for teacher certification. These regulations base certification upon performance. The question of who shall have the authority to certify teachers is discussed. For the English teacher, the 1968 regulations allow permanent certification by taking 30 graduate hours distributed in an unspecified way within the areas of liberal arts, social and behavioral sciences, and professional education. No graduate study in the area of teaching responsibility is specifically required. (DB)

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CERTIFICATION AND THE ENGLISH SPECIALIST*

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Teacher certification became a critical issue in New York in October of 1968 when the State Education Department radically altered the certification requirements in both detail and philosophy. These changes and the way they were made deserve careful scrutiny by all people in and out of New York State who have concern for the quality of public education.

I wish to consider what happened. I wish to say what I think the consequences will be. But I wish to stress that in this recital there are no villains. There are no heroes, either. What there is, certainly, is disagreement. I am addressing myself to the disagreement, and, by so doing, I hope eventually to find a path we can walk together toward a destination we agree to reach.

What happened?

The first word that anything was happening came to me late in September of 1968 in the form of a radio news report that new requirements for the certification of teachers had been approved. More than a month later I received two mimeographed two-page documents from the State Education Department. One, dated October 1968, had the explanatory title "Rationale for Modifications of the Certification Requirements," and the other, undated, gave the new requirements in tabular form. These are still the briefest and most revealing public utterances on the subject. They tell what changes in certification are immediately in effect and what changes are taught to be necessary.

The 1968 regulations for provisional certification specify that elementary school teachers (Nursery through Grade 6) must have a baccalaureate degree, 24 semester hours in professional education, and supervised practice teaching. Elementary school teachers who wish to extend their provisional certification through Grade 9 must have, in addition, a certain number of semester hours in one of several academic areas; for example, to qualify to teach English a person must have 30 semester hours of (unspecified) course work in English. To qualify for provisional certification a secondary school teacher (Grades 7 through 12) must have 36 semester hours of (unspecified) course work in English, 12 semester hours in professional education, and supervised practice teaching. Permanent certification for all elementary school teachers and secondary school teachers of academic subjects can be obtained by earning (1) a master's

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degree in the "field of teaching service" or in a "related" field or (2) 30 graduate hours "distributed among the liberal arts, social and behavioral sciences, and professional study of education."

These 1968 regulations retain loopholes provided in the previous regulations of 1963 and add others. For example, they eliminate the 1963 requirement that a permanently certified English teacher have 15 graduate hours in English in addition to his 36 undergraduate hours in English. As things now stand under the 1968 regulations, an English teacher can obtain permanent certification by simply taking 30 graduate hours distributed in some unspecified way within the general areas of the liberal arts, social and behavioral sciences, and professional education. No graduate study in the area of teaching responsibility is specifically required.

Even more significant is the fact that the 1968 regulations are simply a step toward phasing out *all* course requirements for certification. Presumably in the not far distant future, the State Education Department plans to eliminate completely its 1968 regulations because they are based "solely on input—what has gone into the teacher's preparation" and did not "attest to the teacher's capacity to induce learning on the part of students." In other words, according to the 1968 document, a teacher's actual classroom effectiveness or "output" is to replace "input" as the basis for teacher certification.

What does it mean?

The plan to base certification upon performance or output seems down-to-earth, practical, and sensible. If a man can teach—so the reasoning goes—let him teach. Give him a permanent license. Cut the red tape. Performance, the payoff, is what counts.

I have no doubt that this argument is sound, as far as it goes. But it reminds me of the story about the mice who thought they could insure their safety by belling the cat. Who will bell this cat? The truth is that at this moment no accurate and practical method for measuring performance exists. Nor did it exist in 1968 when certification by performance was officially established as the eventual goal of the State Education Department. Furthermore, even if it were really possible at this very moment to measure actual teacher performance or output to five decimal places, it would still be unsound to base a certification plan on the naive assumption that the teacher has not taught if the student has not learned. Indeed, if the teacher really has *not* taught, the student may still learn; this may actually be what happens in certain schools in neighborhoods where the social code demands academic success. And if the teacher *has* actually taught as well as anyone could, the student may still fail to learn for all sorts of reasons including hunger, fatigue, hostility to the classroom situation or to the world in general.

Surely it must seem strange that a State Education Department should actively promote a plan which it lacks the means to carry out. Yet the Department itself obliquely admitted that it is doing exactly that. "Exploratory work," as the 1968 statement expressed it, "is underway to develop a basis for certification other than course or program completion." One year later, in the October 1969 issue of the *English Record,* Alvin P. Lierheimer, Assistant Commissioner for

Higher Education, expressed the hope that "with state financial and moral support, assessment instruments and procedures for determining the adequacy of beginning teachers should be developed and tested for large scale use" (p. 70). Still another year later, in the September 1970 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, Dr. Lierheimer acknowledged that "Educational product measurement is no easier now with new technology than it was years ago" (p. 24). Strange or not, the State Education Department is indeed actively promoting a plan which it lacks pre-existing means to carry out.

Of course, it is possible that happy solutions to all the problems of teacher assessment will be found in good time. I hope so. But I wonder why "state financial and moral support" for research did not come first. It seems unnecessarily risky to establish policy first and call for research second.

Let us suppose that members of the State Education Department are correct in their claim that the familiar certification policy based on input is inadequate to the task of staffing the public schools with truly well-qualified teachers. Let us suppose, also, that the customary input certification regulations are indeed designed to restrict entry into teaching rather than to attract good people to it, as Dr. Lierheimer claims in his article in the October 1969 issue of the *English Record* (p. 67). Assuming all this is to be correct, it is still fair to ask why input certification is being phased out before anything has been prepared to take its place. The argument in the *Phi Delta Kappen* article that we are not forsaking a valuable old system and so should not demand a warranty from the new system will not stand inspection (p. 25). This is simply another way of saying that we should make the proposed change because we have nothing to lose. Whether we have anything to lose or gain is what we should be trying to find out instead of beclouding the issue by begging the question.

Why overlook the fact that performance certification has hazards, too? At least the input regulations guarantee that teachers have had certain prescribed experiences and have passed prscribed eraminations. That may not guarantee much about whether teachers will perform as well as we should like, but thus far input is all we can measure with accuracy. To scuttle the input system before we have anything measurable to replace it is to take the additional risk of placing teachers in our schools whose education or input is uncertain and whose performance is a prognostication based on hope and ignorance.

Who shall judge?

The 1968 "Rationale" answered the implied question "Who shall judge?" by simply calling for a "redistribution of certification responsibility among schools and colleges, state education departments and professional organizations." Two years later, in the September 1970 issue of *Phi Delta Kappen*, Dr. Lierheimer foresaw a Certification Authority which would supervise the efforts of localities to work out standards and methods for certifying teachers (p. 23).

Members of this Authority would be drawn from many groups having a legitimate interest in the schools—teachers, administrators, legislators, parents, pupils, professional organizations, and teacher educators. One year later, in 1971, the State ducation Department published its first official document dealing with certification since the 1968 "Rationale." Called *A New Style of Certification,* it invited localities to set up pilot Policy Boards which are reminiscent of the Certification Authority. But this time the membership is less inclusive. Lay citizens, national or state teachers groups, and secondary teachers organized in subject-matter groups *may* be represented but their participation is not required. (p. 4). My apprehension is not assuaged by the statement in this document about decision-making groups being "encouraged to seek the counsel of . . . professional associations representing specialized fields . . ." (p. 6). Why are English teachers, and others, denied assurance of an equal voice in the certification process?

A redistribution of certification authority is perfectly acceptable to me provided that the redistribution preserves balance and does not sell out any one group. Teachers and professional organizations have never had an effective voice in determining certification standards and practices, and, therefore, it is understandable if these groups are skeptical of talk about sharing or redistributing responsibility which they never possessed in the first place.

If the authority to certify is to be exercised by localities, as the State Education Department intends, then surely there should be careful safeguards to avoid an undesirable concentration of power. The same people who already have the power to hire and fire and grant tenure would now have the power to certify. During a time of severe budget-cutting, might it not be a temptation to employ *and* certify the person who comes most cheaply rather than the one who is most able? The point, of course, is not that school officials are more susceptible to temptation than other people. The point, rather, is that public policies and procedures should be designed to protect the public.

I cannot agree with Theodore Andrews, of the Bureau of Teacher Certification, who seems to think that this is not a serious problem. In an article in the February 1970 issue of *New York State Education,* Mr. Andrews says that he finds it "hard to believe that school administrators could remain long in school districts were they to assign teachers to areas where they were not competent" (p. 19). It is futile to debate whether Mr. Andrews' faith is justified. I simply submit that the public has a right to expect public policies to be founded on something more substantial than mere hope that virtue will prevail.

When a school employs a teacher, it contracts to live with its selection for a specified time. In making its decision to employ, the school is guided by the fact that the teacher is either provisionally or permanently certified and thus, presumably, has more to offer than someone else who cannot meet certification requirements. If the

school subsequently grants tenure to the teacher, the school, in effect, says to him that it is willing to continue its contractual arrangement for the duration of the teacher's professional life. In this situation, the teacher passes a double muster, one by the State which certified him and one by the school which employed him and tried him out. The school must live with its own decision. However, under the plan envisioned by the State Education Department, all powers, including the power to certify, are bestowed upon local authorities. Yet the decision to certify is the very one which the local district does not always have to live with because a teacher who obtains certification in one school system is then free to seek employment elsewhere. The whole process is local from beginning to end. Nobody specifically represents a state-wide concern. What one district may mistakenly allow, the next may suffer for. Too much power is too heavily concentrated too far away from any agency charged with responsibility to the general public.

If the proponents of performance certification are correct in asserting that performance must be judged locally at the classroom level, then there is a built-in hazard that social, racial, religious, and other peripheral criteria will affect the decision to certify. White faculties for white schools are no more desirable than black faculties for black schools. I can think of nothing more socially and educationally destructive. It seems inconsistent that the State should, for example, support busing to achieve the ideal of racial integration while simultaneously preparing to certify teachers in a way which will make it easier for localities to discriminate in the employment of teachers. The last thing we need in this country is more educational insularity in our suburban, inner city, and rural ghettos.

Possibly in anticipation of the objection that nobody specifically represents a state-wide concern, the State Education Department declared in its 1971 document *A New Style of Certification* that it will "not abdicate its legal responsibility" to exercise its "approval function" and that it will "take an active part in the total evaluation of . . . trial projects" (p. 13). I hope that the State will not abdicate its responsibility after the trial period is over. Assurances on this point remain to be made. I see a need for a continuing State audit of all certification policies and procedures which are locally administered and performance based.

Finally, if the plan is to establish a Certification Authority or Board which is representative of interested groups, then it would be a good idea to include these groups during the early stages of the shift from input to output regulations. The understanding and cooperation of these groups are essential, surely, to the success of the plan. Yet during the years since 1968 I have failed to discern any general movement in this direction. True, a representative from the State Education Department visited several campuses having sizable teacher-preparation programs and conducted informational meetings. True, the Department conducted a symposium in Buffalo attended by fourteen people. True, the New York State Teachers Association

conducted a series of meetings across the state at which a representative from the State Education Department spoke about the new plan to pleased audiences comprised mostly of principals, supervising principals, and district superintendents. True, there have been other efforts like these, but, to my knowledge, the State Education Department has not yet invited any professional education or subject matter organization to join in formulating plans for the improvement of teacher certification. Nor did the State Education Department consult with professional groups in the preparation of its most recent (1971) document *A New Style of Certification.* As the time since 1968 lengthens, I find it increasingly difficult to resist the conclusion that "redistribution of certification responsibility" means only a token involvement in a *fait accompli.*

Where do we go from here?

It seems plain to me that the whole idea of performance certification rests on inadequate research. As one participant in the Department's symposium expressed it, "What can you do? We don't have the research. It is not at the state where we can identify the skills or sort out the ones that are actually crucial to success . . . .* It seems to me, also, that the features of the plan are either indistinct or susceptible to question. My chief worry is that—ironically—performance certification in its present form risks licensing teachers who will not perform even as well as the teachers licensed under the input regulations of 1963. Furthermore, the unilateral method by which the plan was initiated and its subsequent history all suggest a reluctance at the state level to work out improvements in the certification process in cooperation with people who represent the organized profession and certain other legitimately interested groups.

In spite of all the foregoing, there are grounds upon which to build a shared undertaking. Many, like myself, who are opposed to performance certification are not blindly opposed. Nobody, certainly, is opposed to encouraging research to fill some critical gaps in our knowledge. Nobody, certainly, is opposed to experiments to test the worth of the plan. And nobody, so far as I know, is opposed to exploring variations of the plan or alternatives to it which promise to provide better teachers than we now have.

The new process standards offer one hope. If I understand the document properly, it commits us to something like a trial run. This is sensible. Let us see whether performance certification can be made to work better than the present input system has worked. NYSEC-CEE and other professional and community groups, should have an official role in evaluating the trial runs. If the State and the profession can accept this one suggestion, then perhaps we have reversed our course and are coming together at last.

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* The transcript of the proceedings are in Robert C. Burkhart, ed., **The Assessment Revolution.** National Symposium on Evaluation in Education, sponsored jointly by the Division of Teacher Education and Certification of the New York State Education Department and the Teacher Learning Center at the State University College at Buffalo, [1968], p. 78.

In New York, where we go from here depends to a large extent upon how we go. We shall travel a more difficult road to a less worthy destination if some of us try to drag others kicking and screaming toward a Heavenly City which only they can see. For those who do not live in New York, now is the time to prevent unpleasant surprises.

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